

Pupil and family participation in education

Kirsi Konola

Development Manager, KVPS

12th November 2009

Salamanca -15 years on Inclusion –a school for all,
Dublin



Education policy in Finland

- Finnish National Board of Education: Finnish approach to special needs education at the moment is
 - Educational equality and equal educational services
- The objective of special needs education is to help and support pupils in such a way as to give them equal opportunities to complete compulsory schooling in accordance with their abilities and alongside their peers.
- **The first alternative for providing special needs education is to include pupils with special education needs in mainstream classes and, when necessary, provide special needs education in small teaching groups.**
- **Second alternative : the provision of special needs education in a special group, class or school.**
- **The decision on the transfer to special needs education** is made by the school board of the pupil's municipality of residence. This requires consultation with parents.
- An individual education plan (IEP) is provided for each student which is based on curriculum but enables individualisation



From policy to practice

- Municipalities are very independent; they can organize education as they wish so long as they fulfill certain requirements
- Most of the municipalities still emphasize a structure based on segregation (special schools or in basic schools different classes for special needs education)
- Despite the fact that Finland has committed to inclusion the old structures gives possibility to act otherwise
- However there are also special needs education integrated entirely or partly to basic education
- In practice perfect inclusion mainly takes place in small schools in the small municipalities
- Physical integration is a lot more general than genuine inclusion
- There is a principle, that a child with special needs can go to a school which is nearest to his/her home → pupil goes to the same school as other kids from his/her neighborhood
- There are some good practices and most of them are based on families working proactively on this issue
- At the moment a new regulation is *being* prepared which will put an onus on local authorities to change the current system

Kirsi Kohola 12.11.2009



From policy to practice

- There are big differences between different municipalities on how much influence families have on the education system
 - The main idea is still, that there is a special system and a pupil with special needs goes through that system.
 - The diversity of different education models is not very wide
 - However the quality of special education is good , although there *are* regional differences in this too
- *New options on how education is provided and organised are required.*

(Olli-Pekka Haverinen, Special education teacher and father of a child with learning disability)



School of Rahola

(Anne Myllylä, a mother; Irmeli Heiskanen, vice-headteacher)

- In the 1990's there was *a* kind of structure which *was* common at this time, which involved the separation of ordinary and special classes.
- In the school there was discussion about inclusion, which reflected the level of discussion which was taking place in Finland in seminars etc. at this time.
- Some parents asked, “have you ever thought, that our children could go to normal class” and were ready to work for this goal despite the scepticism
- There was some new teachers in the school who were ready to support them
- Despite contradictions this group of parents and teachers was definite about their goal → totally inclusive school
- Main objective: less restrictive environment
- Now this school has worked like that for 10 years



How does it work?

- The school forms one unit also with a single administration
- A class with two teachers working with the whole group
- The class is divided into small groups according to everybody's strengths
- Every pupil gets the education from the same basis, no special services, only support for those who need it
- Everybody has got benefit from this, school is very popular
- Teachers encounter all families in the same way, no different services for "special families"



What was needed?

- Parents were dedicated to the goal. They had the courage to go with their plans to meet up with local authorities and politicians
- They needed a lot of time and effort
- School was committed also and was ready to make the necessary pedagogic plans.
- There must be strong ethical principles in the school and these values must be in the service plan also



Role of the parents

- Parents are involved in advising the school about the principles of inclusion
- School must see parents as a resource, not as objects of charity
- Parents must be aware of their rights, find the people that share common interests → these small groups can get things to go forward



General principles

- Co-operation with school and home is generally well organized, the importance of the family in supporting education is recognized
 - Most often there is an association for parents in every school
 - There are no general practice, every school has its own ethos and method of teaching
- There are good opportunities to participate but whether you can have true impact or not is up to the municipalities and parents



Participation of the pupils

- Pupils with special educational needs are able to participate in the development of their own individual educational plan.
- This means that the curriculum is individualized and standards are set on that basis
- In this plan there is
 - a description of support needed and how the support will be organized (personal assistant materials, equipments)
 - objectives and contents of education, and how these will be evaluated
- There is also possibility for additional education (10th grade)
 - Own curriculum: Academic skills, residential skills, working skills, human relation skills, leisure time
- Pupils individual education plan for the future
 - Each student makes individual plan for studies and aims according to the plan to reach vocational education and independent living
 - Evaluation: Where the student is now and how is he/she getting on, involving the student, parents, teachers



Obstacles for Inclusion

- Many special education teachers are against inclusion in many places
- Ordinary teachers feel that they don't have enough education to support children with special needs
- Some parents are against inclusion
 - They still want special services
 - They are afraid of bullying
- Attitudes in society



Discussion

- Good practices in other countries to enable the participation of pupils and families
- What should be done to improve the situation?
- What recommendations can we make



Thank You!

Kirsi Konola

Kirsi.konola@kvps.fi



KEHITYSVAMMAISTEN
PALVELUSÄÄTIÖ

